



This work has been submitted to **NECTAR**, the **Northampton Electronic Collection of Theses and Research**.

Article

Title: Veiling and unveiling: Mansfield's modernist aesthetics

Creator: Wilson, J. M.

Example citation: Wilson, J. M. (2014) Veiling and unveiling: Mansfield's modernist aesthetics. *Journal of New Zealand Literature, Special Issue: Katherine Mansfield: Masked and Unmasked*. **32**(2), pp. 203-225. 0112-1227.

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from this work.

Version: Accepted version

<http://nectar.northampton.ac.uk/7253/>



Veiling and Unveiling: Mansfield's modernist aesthetics

Janet Wilson, University of Northampton

A fashion item in Victorian and early twentieth-century society valued for its diaphanous and transparent properties and endowed with a unique female significance, the veil is represented in nineteenth-century fiction principally as an image of female confinement, although its impermanence also suggests the possibility of change. According to Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar the veil, unlike the door, is potentially both open and shut, rendering boundaries transient and porous, 'always holding out the mystery of imminent revelation, the promise or the threat that one might be able to see, hear, or even feel through the veil which separates two distinct spheres'.¹

Mansfield draws on Victorian representations of the veil associated with imagery of enclosure and in works by writers like Louisa May Alcott ('Behind a Mask') and Mary Elizabeth Braddon (*Lady Audley's Secret*), with the veiled lady's strategy of survival in a male-dominated world through her duplicity, clairvoyance and exceptional insight.² But she goes further than her predecessors by using the veil as a mask-like appendage to define the limits of female constraint and show the heroine opening up to new experiences and modes of articulation. As part of a discourse about clothes and costumes that includes other accessories like the muff, fan, hat, parasol, gloves and scarf, the veil introduces an engagement with socially constructed stereotypes of the female, indexing the escapist urge into fantasy, encouraging the production of new images of the self even while the familiar patterns of domesticity, society and gender reassert themselves. The material veil's

mechanics of being lifted or lowered delineate upper-class women as partly visible and partly screened, moving between their public and private selves, suggesting the potential for agency, self-affirmation, disguise or retreat. When used in conjunction with the mirror, which reflects, images and distorts, the veil that masks operates in Mansfield's stories as an emblem of fiction itself; while its function to cover but not halt the movement of time leads to its use as a rhetorical trope of transience, masking and self fashioning.

This essay traces Mansfield's changing uses of the veil as she moves away from her early obsession with the art for art's sake aestheticism of Pater and Wilde. In keeping with Vincent O'Sullivan's claim made in 1985, reinforced in recent studies by Sarah Sandley and Maurizio Ascari, that Mansfield supercedes an impressionist subjectivity, emerging at the forefront of modernism through adopting to her own style modes of cinematic representation, I suggest that the veil and mirror in her work foreground her interest in forms of seeing, viewing and temporality. As narrative props they focus perspectives that are dependent on the viewing position and the moment of being seen; for perception changes depending from *where* one views the object.³ Aesthetically attracted by the new medium of cinema from about 1911, Mansfield adopted the veil to her modernist experimentation with techniques such as close up, montage⁴ and flashback, used as alternative narrative modes. Sight and vision call on temporality for effect; like the camera shutter controlling length of exposure, the opening or closing of the veil offers glimpses of the female subject at moments of crisis. Stories in which the consciousness of the female heroine is articulated in such gestures, which interrupt

the flux of time, challenging stereotypes of class and gender, are often performative, self consciously fictive or parodic, dimensions that emerge in her refiguring of the veil as symbol both of transience and revelation in the late stories. Veiling and unveiling are aligned with the imagery of mist, which in falling and rising provides glimpses of an occluded reality. Indeed, because it is associated with a dimension of the unknown that offers intermittent, flickering moments of visibility, the veil that obscures and reveals, like the mirror and mask, can be linked to the spectral quality of her last stories..

'Die Einsame (The Lonely One)' (1904)

The earliest image of the veil in Mansfield's work is associated with the isolated artist who embodies the contradictions represented by creativity and liberation, the unconscious and the death drive. In 'Die Einsame', written when she was sixteen, Mansfield gives voice to fears of loneliness, darkness and unfulfilled desires: the solitary child who sings her song at night (symbol of the unconscious, according to Cherry Hankin)⁵ sacrifices her life to art's ghostly powers. 'She sang with her arms out to the sea. Sang with a passionate longing, a wild, mad entreaty.'⁶ The 'God' she seeks as saviour materialises as a spectral figure on the ocean, but his boat vanishes as she approaches, and in turning back abruptly she drowns. Die Einsame's liminal emplacement between sea and land, life and death, is signified by 'Her hair [which] hung loose and streamed out behind her like a veil' (I, p. 20) as she vainly seeks a transcendent homecoming.

The mythic dimensions of this journey to her Maker draw on the familiar Christian dualism. The image of Die Einsame's veil-like hair floating between the disjunct realms of the phenomenal and noumenal suggests that Mansfield's art is an illusory medium that allows her to solicit a higher Being but fails to anchor her. Veil imagery, therefore, figures early on in the oscillation between advance and retreat that Sylvia Berkman has noted in her work: 'Always she sought to find the gateway to Eden; always she fell back from an impenetrable wall.'⁷ This realm of frustrated desire and bodily collapse in a cruel and inhospitable world is one that many of her female heroines occupy. But, as Janet Sydney Kaplan points out, Mansfield broke out of this impasse briefly when 'she asserted herself through impersonation, through trying on "all sorts of lives"'; the veil and mirror are components of this performative dimension of her art.⁸ As a story marked by the consciousness of death and the death drive, staged as symbolic search for the state from which the girl has departed and to which she longs to return, 'Die Einsame' also anticipates the presence of the uncanny in Mansfield's work. Freud's essay on the uncanny argues that this feeling is manifested through the constituent processes of doubling, division and identity interchange, all of which are identifiable with the properties of the veil and mirror as represented in Mansfield's handling of these motifs.⁹

The veil and mirror: catalysts to the imagination

When worn by upper-class women as a signifier of class and influence, the veil represents a social ideal of femininity: represented in combination with the mirror, veiling/unveiling is associated with ocular reflection in moments that define turning

points for the heroine. In the seminal story, 'The Tiredness of Rosabel' (1908), written before Mansfield left for England in 1908, the props of veil, hat and hand-mirror are catalysts for a fantasy of romance, wealth and happiness. These incorporate tropes, such as the uncanny double, shadows and spectral imagery, that will reappear in other stories. The transformation of the impoverished, working-class shop-girl, Rosabel, begins with the unveiling, modelling and mirroring of an elegantly attired client in the presence of her escort, Harry. 'Rosabel took the pins out of her hat, untied her veil and gave her a hand mirror.' Her successful modelling of the new hat triggers the wish to take her wealthy client's place:

Rosabel turned to the mirror and placed it on her brown hair, then faced them.
'Oh Harry isn't it adorable,' the girl cried, 'I must have that! She smiled again at Rosabel. 'It suits you, beautifully.' (I, p. 135)

The speculation, 'Suppose they changed places' (I, p. 136), leads to Rosabel's fantasy of being swept off her feet by Harry's desire, as now in shimmering attire she enjoys a sumptuous banquet, rapturous courtship, then marriage. This appears to be one answer to the question the wealthy client asks of her escort: "What exactly is it that I want, Harry?", a question that reverberates in all of Mansfield's fictions about women. But its wider implications -- how individual female identity can be constructed outside preordained class and gender roles -- are by-passed. Rosabel's inner flash of anger at the lady's praise -- 'It suits you beautifully' -- and her vivid imaginings later that night, after Harry's condescending remark that she should be painted -- "You've got such a damned pretty little figure" (I, p. 135) -- are also triggered by her perception of social inequality.¹⁰ Her subjective response to her mirror image goes unrecorded, further underlining the social, ideological

constraints on female aspiration that amount to little more than escapism from impoverished working-class conditions. In her reverie about Harry as her handsome prince, the veil reappears as an unchanging image of upper class values: 'She would sit down before the mirror and the little French maid would fasten her hat and find her a thin white veil and another pair of white suede gloves' (I, p. 136).

Mansfield's narrative structure draws on the familiar Romantic binaries of reality and dream;¹¹ but the veil and mirror will become vehicles of psychological insight or blindness in moments of (mis)recognition in later stories like 'The Little Governess' or 'Late at Night'. Yet the story's spatial transitions and movement as Rosabel travels across London, recording an unceasing flow of impressions alongside the fluctuations of her consciousness, represent significant advances in narrative technique. In this story Mansfield continues to pioneer the stream of consciousness technique that she began in her unfinished novel, 'Juliet' (1907).¹² According to Shiv K. Kumar this 'reveals the constant interpenetration of different states of consciousness into one another', for she aimed at 'breaking through the hard crust of outer experience in an attempt to represent the inner flow of thought'.¹³ Although Rosabel's dreams and illusions are subordinated to the reproduction of male-dominated stereotypes of female luxury and privilege, Mansfield's representation of fantasies of an alternative dream-identity is innovative in its privileging of a transformed female subjectivity. It will be developed in other stories that record women's consciousness at moments of ambivalence, emotional intensity or confusion, and where change in the real world refuses to happen.¹⁴

The use of accessories such as the veil and hat in conjunction with the mirror to signal the heroine's shifting consciousness and emotions, confirms the acutely visual orientation of Mansfield's imagination, which, as Sarah Sandley and Maurizio Ascari have noted, was heightened by her interest in the silent movie, and her development of a cinematic aesthetic.¹⁵ The veil and mirror's capacities to obscure, distort and reveal make them important constituents in those arrangements of images, which she began to prefer over traditional narrative methods, and her foregrounding of movement, symbol and gesture to carry narrative momentum.¹⁶ In her adaptation of cinematic technique Mansfield focuses on the fluid and mobile actions of veiling/unveiling and ocular reflection as equivalent to the close up, and as Ascari notes, bodily movement and the importance of body language are heightened.¹⁷ The direction of the gaze – in narratological terms that of the focaliser -- also informs Mansfield's recording of movements and gestures the perception of which involve psychological transitions: for example, in 'The Escape' it is the husband who observes the contents of his wife's handbag at the moment she puts up her veil to wipe her eyes: 'her powder-puff, her rouge stick [...] a broken cigarette, a mirror' ; ignoring her distress he is reminded of death: "In Egypt she would be buried with those things." (II, p. 218)

Henri Bergson's notion of the psychological perception of time is another likely influence. Mansfield would have become familiar with Bergson's philosophy when she was working with A.R. Orage on the *New Age*, and then with Murry on *Rhythm*, during the years when English translations of his works were being published. Like Henry James, however, she combines durational time with

phenomenological time when introducing spatialised moments. As Julia Van Gunsteren explains: 'Phenomenological time stresses the "moment" of events which because they are imperceptibly framed and spatially perceived take on the literary impressionists' hallmark of temporally extended, frozen moments of spatialised time that dissolve and return to the flow of durational time'.¹⁸ The halting of the flux of time so that it is spatialised and framed has aesthetic affinities to the cinematic technique of close-up; the veil as protective cover and mirror as reflector are used as framing devices in moments of inner crisis or struggle, for viewing, self address and reassurance.¹⁹

In 'The Little Governess' (1915), the heroine's tremulous fears and palpitating anxieties when at the mercy of a loudly assertive, mendacious porter at the railway station, culminate in a moment of mistaken recognition that she believes concludes the flux and confusion of travel. As she catches sight of herself in the mirror before she unties her veil and unbuttons her cape, the camera shutter closes on a brief glimpse of her character and motivation when deprived of her social mask:

As she stood up to feel if the dress-basket was firm she caught sight of herself in the mirror, quite white, with big round eyes. She untied her 'motor veil' and unbuttoned her green cape.²⁰ 'But it's all over now,' she said to the mirror face, feeling in some way that it was more frightened than she (I, p. 424).

By such reassurance, ignoring the signs of distress that she sees in the mirror, the little governess makes herself even more vulnerable. This fatal miscalculation is represented by her disassociation from the double, the mirror image of the white, round-eyed face with its visible manifestation of fear. The interior shift marks a narrative transition and sharpening of irony with the exclamation "I can look after

myself—of course I can' (I, p. 424). A symbolic reading suggests that removal of the veil and cape, then hat and gloves, points to the little governess's increasing disconnection from her real feelings of fear and terror, and hence her 'authentic' self, as new versions of selfhood are generated by her excitement and enchantment in the company of the old gentleman who enters her carriage.

Mansfield's use of the distorting, truth-telling, and doubling properties of the mirror, when framed to demarcate a moment of psychological perception, represents a development of the techniques of 'The Tiredness of Rosabel' whose heroine does not respond to her image in the mirror but only to the wealthy couple whom she serves. But the capacity for 'othering oneself induced by the mirror's reflection becomes a key motif in later narratives about ageing, loneliness or loss, such as her story about acting for the cinema, 'Pictures', 'The Lost Battle', 'Late at Night', as well as the complex entanglements of 'Bliss' and 'Revelations'.²¹

The incomplete episode, 'The Dark Hollow', written sometime in 1915, possibly after 'The Little Governess', marks a further change in Mansfield's handling of the veil as vehicle for exploring female subjectivity; here it is associated with impersonation, inauthenticity and the necessary artifice involved in story telling. The doubled and divided identity of the heroine, the Russian actress, Nina, emerges in her reassuring self-appraisal before the mirror, and is reinforced by her donning the veil as symbol of disguise, performance and duplicity.²² These acts are indicative of the story's destabilising of gender boundaries as Nina moves from a heterosexual love affair, to follow other feelings of sexual desire, expressed through an affectionate yet ambiguous relationship with Louise who comes across her in the

street. Role playing and impersonation undermine concepts of authentic being in keeping with Sydney Janet Kaplan's claim, made in relation to Mansfield's non-conformist sexuality, that she was suspicious of the idea of an essential self or sexual nature because it is 'indicative of underlying "truth" about her real self'.²³ Mansfield may also have been preparing the psychological grounds for the portrait of the narcissistic Beryl and her true and false selves in 'The Aloe', which she began writing in early 1915.²⁴ Like Beryl, who acknowledges she is always playing a part, and later, Bertha in 'Bliss' whose sees herself as 'other' in the mirror, Nina uses her reflection in the mirror to create her frame of mind, addressing herself as 'You're a sweet creature, aren't you?' (I, p. 462); her friend Louise, possibly her alter ego, reinforces this admiring self-appraisal with "'You're such a little beauty. You *are* a lovely little being'", seemingly closing a solipsistic circle (I, p. 466).

The story opens in media res as Nina abandons her lover saying 'I've done with you', and after 'grubbing' in a drawer for 'a little black lace veil', flings herself out of doors (I, p. 462). As in 'Die Einsame' the veil demarcates the heroine's transition from the familiar and intimate (the domestic space) to the strange and unknown (the streets outside). Her departure and opening up to sexual freedom involving role playing, imitation and deception -- that is, the invention of a newly vulnerable self, overlapping the earlier self, wounded by the mistakes of the past -- can be metaphorically aligned with the veil's properties of obscuring and concealing. But Nina's aimless wandering and copying of passers-by also betray loss of identity and belonging, while impersonation provokes awareness of a pattern of repetition and duplication. The 'faint voice' from the 'dark hollow' into which her thoughts have

dropped tells her, “This has happened to you before and will happen again and again and again” (I, p. 463), reminding her of the insubstantiality, faintness and inaccessibility of her ‘real’ self, in ways reminiscent of Beryl’s perceptions.²⁵ The story’s one potentially objective viewing position offers little critical distance, for Louise who ‘rescues’ Nina, ‘her eyes very big and black behind the black veil’ (I, p. 463), despite being aware of her duplicity, accepts her invented narrative. As with ‘The Little Governess’ unveiling widens the division imaged in the mirror reflection, while the ‘real’ self is even more diminished by role playing and the invention of multiple selves. Finally, Nina’s fake confession, as she revels in her assumed power over Louise, makes her exult: “But the crying. I did not put that on. No I could not help that. How I sobbed!” she thought admiringly’ (I, p. 466); it reflects the interplay between impersonation and confession that Kaplan has noted is characteristic of Mansfield’s fiction.²⁶ This pleasure in her performance suggests that Mansfield is developing the parody of the narcissistic false artist, which draws on cinematic frames, illusions to cinema and photographic images, in her portrait of the deeply inauthentic Raoul Duquette in ‘Je ne parle pas français’.

The mechanics of the material veil

In Mansfield’s adaptation to narrative fiction of cinematic stylisations of body language, movement and gesture, the veil’s mechanics of shutting and opening signal entry and exit, or in social terms, invitation and withdrawal. Such economic forms of notation, including a typography of fragmentation, are to Vincent O’Sullivan evidence of Mansfield’s habit of thought and the ‘transitory vividness’ of ‘the

cinematic interrupted moment in fiction'.²⁷ These techniques coalesced in her six experiments with dialogue in which the authorial presence is erased, published in *The New Age* in May and June 1917.²⁸ A mini-narrative of departure in a letter of 30 July 1917, alluding to the veil: 'How strange life is! Goodbye. One taps upon the counter & pays the waiter, pulls down one's veil & -- goes --' ²⁹ , is echoed in the stage directions for the dialogue of 'The Black Cap' (1917): the woman who decides to return to her husband '*waits for a moment, and then puts down her veil, and takes up her suitcase*' (II, p. 31). In 'A Dill Pickle' (1917) the veil signals both invitation and finalisation: the woman, Vera, raises her veil to signal willingness to enter intimate exchange with her chance acquaintance, then draws it down in conclusion (II, pp. 98. 102).

In 'The Escape' (written in c. May 1920), a story of marital strife, the veil functions as a structural motif: its being raised and closed correlate to transitions in the middle-class woman's turbulent state of mind as her attack on her husband yields to momentary self pity, exhaustion, then renewed accusations. The title is ironic: her emotional impasse means that escape can only be invoked -- "if I don't escape from you for a minute I shall go mad" (II, 221) -- but not accomplished. She emerges from this inconclusive contretemps as the victim of her own self delusion, while her husband, who experiences an epiphany under a massive oak tree in which he finds peace from her furious antagonism, is seemingly unable to make sense of his enlightenment. The veil is associated with other images of layering and disguise: face-powder, smoke and dust. As in 'The Dark Hollow' it belongs to a discourse of half-truths in which the lady reconstructs her version of events. Escape is no more

than evasion and escapism in this narrative about illusion and artifice that concludes with apparent reinstatement of the status quo.

The veil's functions contrast to those of the lady's parasol, an instrument of discord, which in being redefined (as a phallic symbol of male authority on the lady's part, a protection against wind rather than sun on her husband's), sentimentally revalued (once her mother's, it is 'The parasol I prize more than—more than. . . .' (II, p. 220)), and finally relocated (being retrieved from the road into which it has fallen) signifies the increasing strain on the marriage. For example, in her reconstruction of the events that caused them to miss the train, casting herself as victim of her husband's incompetence, she speculates that he would have her tell the porters what to do. The parasol signifies the hierarchies of class and gender: 'Had he expected her to go outside, to stand under the awning in the heat and point with her parasol?' (II, p. 218). The veil, however, is an extension of her personality associated with that other appendage, her purse with 'its shiny silvery jaws', whose contents of power puff, rouge-stick and mirror, refer to cosmetic adornment, self-decoration and masking. Raising the veil signals the lady's switch from anger to self-pity, her emotional brittleness. Like the mirror it becomes a site of self-scrutiny: 'She put up her veil and, as though she were doing it for someone else, pitifully, as though she were saying to someone else, "I know my darling", she pressed the handkerchief to her eyes' (II, 218). It is also the touchstone for the story's imagery of masking and illusion. As the couple travel in a carriage that will take them to another train, her she lowers the veil as protection against what the wind blows over them: her face powder and dust (a type of natural 'veil') -- "Oh, the dust," she breathed, "the

disgusting, revolting dust.” And she put down her veil and lay back as if overcome’ (II, p. 219); this anticipates the husband’s imaging of himself as psychologically burnt out: ‘a hollow man, a parched, withered man, as it were, of ashes’ (II, p. 221).

W.H. New has drawn attention to the theatricality of this story, whose setting conveys the illusion of a stage set with its props of parasol and veil and the mask of the heavily made-up woman beneath her veil, symbolised by the rouge and powder in her handbag, and her conscious acting out of a role.³⁰ It also displays a cinematic awareness of viewing angles, such as shifts between man and wife as focaliser, as well as abrupt juxtapositions of time and place. The consciousness of artifice in behaviour is parallel to that in fiction making, and is reflected, as New notes in the narrative form itself, which points to the ways that reality is evaded and even foreclosed through the husband’s epiphany. For if epiphany suggests mystical dissolution in a greater whole, then it also might ignore particular truths of human relationships. In the story’s exploration of the tension between the overt desire to escape from the status quo and the implied desire not to change it, the lady’s veil is associated finally with confinement, constraint and silence, the inability to articulate any greater meaning. Its distinctive narrative structure, which uses symbol, contrast and epiphany points to a buried discourse underpinning the inconclusive picture of superficial togetherness at the end.

IV. Mists and Unveiling, Blindness and Vision

Associated with the veil’s use as protection from the external world of nature in ‘The Escape’ is its metaphoric function: to screen human consciousness from reality.

Mansfield's interpretation of the veil as an instrument of revelation because it enables access to a deeper sense of things can be linked to Henri Bergson's view that reality cannot be confronted directly;³¹ it is hinted at in a letter she wrote to her lover, Garnet Trowell in October 1908, just after she arrived in London:

Beloved half the world is blind, as you say — I cannot understand how they pass their days, but, since you have held and dominated my life, I feel the last veil between me and the heart of things has been swept away --³²

Mansfield's stories about New Zealand also draw on the familiar imagery of mist as a veil such as 'the veil of morning mist' alluded to in George Eliot's story 'The Lifted Veil'.³³ The opening of 'At the Bay' and 'The Garden Party' with the unveiling or birth of the natural world at dawn, is associated with the momentary glimpse or gleam as mentioned in a letter of October 1917 to Dorothy Brett about the new style -- 'my own invention' -- of 'Prelude'; this had been crafted following her brother Leslie's tragic death in October 1915.³⁴

Well, in the early morning there I always remember feeling that this little island had dipped back into the dark blue sea during the night only to rise again at beam of day, all hung with bright spangles and glittering drops - [...] I tried to catch that moment -- with something of this sparkle and its flavour. And just as on those morning white milky mists rise and uncover some beauty, then smother it again and then again disclose it. I tried to lift that mist from my people and let them be seen and then to hide them again . . .³⁵

The mist's lifting and falling suggest the artist's ability to perceive and reveal through insight and vision; the setting of 'At the Bay', for example, can be compared to a stage set with a curtain whose rise and fall she controls..³⁶ Such movements -- mist rising, a curtain being raised -- can be linked to Mansfield's moment of enlightenment in the traumatic period after her brother's death, the renewed

experience of intimacy involving her psychic reconnection to Leslie through telepathy, also described as mist rising:

It is with you I see and that is why I see so clearly. [...] My brother I had doubted these last few days. I have been in dreadful places. I have felt that I could not come through to you. But now, quite suddenly, the mists are rising and I see and I know you are near me. You are more vividly with me now this moment than if you were alive.³⁷

Mansfield's crossing of the boundary between life and death through the gaze of the mind's eye is represented as an enhanced moment of perception: Leslie is 'more vividly with me now this moment than if you were alive'.

The imagery of blindness and vision associated with mists and veils, alongside the spatial and temporal interruptions associated with telepathic revelation, can be read in relation to Mansfield's innovative late story 'Taking the Veil'. The title alludes to the heroine's fantasy of joining a closed order and her willing self-delusion about love, both secular and religious. Play-going, theatrical illusion and the privileged position of the viewer, are now catalysts. Watching a play inaugurates a procession of daydreams for Edna, for at the moment the hero is struck blind she falls in love with the famous actor playing the part – and mentally breaks off her engagement. Other fantasies involving even more extravagant self-constructions follow. Upon visiting the Catholic convent in Hill St, Wellington, she assumes religious spirituality by becoming Sister Angela; but although the vision of her saintliness, death and burial culminating in the grieving of her fiancé and parents suddenly collapses into illusion, it is followed by an imagined new version of love: marriage to her childhood sweetheart, children and family life.

This semi-surreal, semi-satirical story about modes of seeing -- viewing, spectatorship, observation vision, illumination — involving falsification and illusion, turns on the movement between representation and imagination, as the mind's blindness ignores the sight of the real world. Reality is dematerialised by Edna's unleashed imagination and appears only in the observations of unconscious nature and its reproductive cycle in the garden where she undergoes her imagined transformation. 'A big bee, a golden furry fellow, crept into a freesia, and the delicate flower leaned over, swung, shook; and when the bee flew away it fluttered still as though it were laughing. Happy careless flower!' (II, p. 470)

These fleeting visions of the transient natural world constitute momentary interruptions of Edna's delusionary inner life: the disjunctive modes of seeing, one phenomenological and the other abstract and cerebral, help structure a story in which much of the represented world is invisible because of Edna's dominating consciousness. 'Taking the Veil' owns that flickering quality which is characteristic of Mansfield's late work, conveying a sense of impermanence and mortality alongside a perception of resistance to change. Affinities between her narrative innovation and cinematic modes of projecting light can also be identified, in keeping with Julian Wolfreys' identification in spectrality (referring to Derrida's definition)³⁸ of 'a certain vibration, a wavering of shimmering, perhaps itself analogous to the flickering of light in cinematic projection, within and as part of the structure of representation'.³⁹

As in 'Die Einsame' the veil in the title, 'Taking the Veil', can be read as a metaphor for transitions between unlike states and realms: secular and religious,

reality and illusion. Consciously fictive, like 'The Tiredness of Rosabel' and 'The Escape', it is a satire on vision as escapism: Edna's revelation about true love at the theatre and her entry into a religious order constitute a parody of the predicament of women, in stories such as 'The Escape', who are constricted by self-denial and incarceration yet incapable of change. Edna's imagined assertion to her fiancé: "No, Jimmy, I will never change" (II, p. 469) and the reiteration in the culminating fantasy of what was originally rejected – domesticity -- make this very point.⁴⁰ Like 'Die Einsame' it is concerned with performance, illusion and the death drive, although it offers a more assured exploration of the relationship between fiction making and mortality, playfully reconfiguring its heroine's vision of death as one of new life.

The material veil both as semi-transparent fashion accessory and mask is a key trope in Mansfield's modernist experimentation with narrative form, image and symbol. As an important image in stories that explore the shifting consciousness of the female heroine, the veil with its distinctive mechanics suggests the constraints that women experienced in a patriarchal society when they discovered their dependence on the hierarchies of gender just at that moment when they most wanted to lift themselves above them; as an emblem of disguise and distortion it also demarcates the encounter with darker and more perplexing forces within the self that the struggle for self determination opens up. Yet Mansfield's experimentation also points to the inadequacy of the material veil's properties that can appear to halt the ravages of time by covering and seemingly protecting objects

and people, but ultimately cannot prevent time's passing. Finally, in ironic knowledge of this 'truth', the veil as material object can only be metaphorically unveiled and reassembled as narrative device. In 'Taking the Veil' it exists as no more than a rhetorical, iterative trope, metaphorically represented in an idiomatic phrase to suggest the dangerous pleasures of yielding to illusion.

NOTES

¹ Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: Women Writers and the Nineteenth Century Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 468-69.

² Cited by Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 473.

³ Vincent O'Sullivan, 'Introduction', *The Aloe* (London: Virago Press, 1985), p. xvi; Sarah Sandley, 'Leaping into the Eyes: Mansfield as a Cinematic Writer', in *Celebrating Katherine Mansfield: A Centenary Volume of Essays*, ed. Gerri Kimber and Janet Wilson (London; Palgrave, 2010), pp. 72-83. On Mansfield as Post-Impressionist see also Angela Smith, *Katherine Mansfield: A Literary Life* (London: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 8, 22; Maurizio Ascari, *Cinema and the Imagination in Katherine Mansfield's Writing* (London: Palgrave, 2014), pp. 25-28.

⁴ Peter Stowell, *Literary Impressionism, James, Chekov* (University of Georgia Press, 1981), p. 39, points out that the absence of temporal transitions in the impressionists' method, contributed to the effect of spatial montage, anticipating the cinema.

⁵ *Katherine Mansfield and Her Confessional Stories* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1983), p.10. . See also Maurizio Ascari, in 'Katherine Mansfield and the Gardens of the Soul', *Katherine Mansfield Studies 2* (2010), 39-55 (41-42).

⁶ *The Edinburgh Edition of the Collected Fiction of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. by Gerri Kimber and Vincent O'Sullivan, 2 vols (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012). I, p. 20. All quotations from the edition are placed parenthetically in the text as volume number followed by page number.

⁷ Sylvia Berkman, *Katherine Mansfield, A Critical Study* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951), pp. 12-13.

⁸ Sydney Janet Kaplan, *Katherine Mansfield and the Origins of Modernist Fiction* (Ithaca and London; Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 171. Citing *The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. by Vincent O'Sullivan and Margaret Scott, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984-2008), 1, p. 19.

⁹ Sigmund Freud, 'The "Uncanny"', in *Writings on Art and Literature*, Foreword Neil Hertz, (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1997): pp. 193-233. On the uncanny and the death drive, see Clare Hanson, 'Katherine Mansfield's Uncanniness', in *Celebrating Katherine Mansfield: A Centenary Volume of Essays*, ed. Gerri Kimber and Janet Wilson (London, Palgrave 2011), pp. 115-30 (117-19).

¹⁰ Ana Belen Lopez Perez, "'A City of One's Own': Women, Social Class and London in Katherine Mansfield's Short Stories' in *Katherine Mansfield and Literary Modernism*, ed. Janet Wilson, Gerri Kimber and Susan Reid (London Continuum, 2010), pp. 128-138 (131), observes that in the city social class is one of the turning points for Mansfield's female characters.

¹¹ See Pamela Dunbar, *Radical Mansfield: Double Discourse in Katherine Mansfield's Short Stories* (London: MacMillan's Press, 1997), p. 5.

¹² Kaplan, *Katherine Mansfield and the Origins of Modernist Fiction*, p. 96.

¹³ Shiv K. Kumar, *Bergson and the Stream of Consciousness Novel* (London: Blackie 1962), pp. 40-41. Cited by Eiko Nakano, in 'Katherine Mansfield and French Philosophy', *Katherine Mansfield Studies 1*

(2009), 68-82 (71). Kumar's claim that 'The Tiredness of Rosabel' is the first experimentation in this narrative mode, does not consider the passage in 'Juliet' that Mansfield was writing during 1907.

¹⁴ See Kate Fullbrook, 'Katherine Mansfield; Subjection and Authority', in *The Fine Instrument: Essays on Katherine Mansfield*, ed. Paulette Michel and Michel Dupuis (Sydney: Dangaroo Press, 1989), pp. 51-60 (54). Fullbrook identifies 'The Swing of the Pendulum' and 'A Cup of Tea' as stories about women who pull back from change and self knowledge.

¹⁵ Sandley, 'Leaping into the Eyes: Mansfield as a Cinematic Writer', p. 73; Ascari, *Cinema and the Imagination in Katherine Mansfield's Writing*, p. 4.

¹⁶ Sandley, 'Leaping into the Eyes', p. 79.

¹⁷ Ascari, *Cinema and the Imagination in Katherine Mansfield's Writing*, pp. 38, 62. Mansfield developed an interest in mime and was a devotee of Charlie Chaplin from 1918.

¹⁸ Julia Gunsteren, *Katherine Mansfield and Literary Impressionism* (Amsterdam & Atlanta: Rodopi, 1990), p. 63; see also Stowell, *Literary Impressionism, James, Chekov*: 'Time is both an imperceptible stream and a cluster of diverse instants, spatialised and framed.' (p. 176).

¹⁹ Ascari, *Cinema and the Imagination in Katherine Mansfield's Writing*, p. 53, sees an affinity between the close-up shot and the psychological enquiry initiated by the mirror as framing device; see also Sarah Sandley, 'Katherine Mansfield's "Glimpses"', in *Katherine Mansfield: In From the Margin*, ed. Roger Robinson (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1994), pp. 70-89 (75).

²⁰ The 'motor veil', fashionable in the early twentieth century, was worn for motoring; it covered a motor hat and was tied under the chin.

²¹ On other mirror images see Andree-Marie Harmat, "'Is the master out or in?'" or Katherine Mansfield's Twofold Vision of Self', in *The Fine Instrument*, pp. 117-25.

²² Conversely the lack of a veil implies a greater authenticity of being in the 1907 sketch 'She unpacked her box': She ran into the bedroom put on a long coat and fur cap—no gloves, she decided, and no veil, no umbrella, but just a fine, fresh poverty-stricken feeling' (I p. 77).

²³ Kaplan, *Katherine Mansfield and the Origins of Modernist Fiction*, p. 37.

²⁴ See Vincent O'Sullivan, 'Introduction', *The Aloe* (London: Virago Press, 1985), pp. viii-ix, xii.

²⁵ See Jenijoy La Belle, *Herself Beheld: The Literature of the Looking Glass* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 92-93.

²⁶ Kaplan, *Katherine Mansfield and the Origins of Modernist Fiction*, p. 176.

²⁷ O'Sullivan, 'Introduction' to *The Aloe*, p. xvii; reprinted in 'Finding the Pattern: Solving the Problem: Katherine Mansfield the New Zealand European', in *Katherine Mansfield: In From the Margin*, pp. 9-24, (15).

²⁸ See Ascari, *Cinema and the Imagination in Katherine Mansfield's Writing*, pp. 38-42.

²⁹ *The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield*, 1, p. 320.

³⁰ W.H. New, *Reading Mansfield and Metaphors of Form* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), pp. 158-75; reprinted from 'Reading "The Escape"', in *Katherine Mansfield: In From the Margin*, pp. 90-111.

³¹ 'Between nature and ourselves, nay between ourselves and our own consciousness a veil is interposed'; Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. by Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (London: Macmillan, 1911), p. 150. Mansfield may have read this text in the original French when she was in England in 1903-06; it was first published in 1900 in the *Revue de Paris*.

³² *The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield*, 1, pp. 72-73.

³³ George Eliot, *The Lifted Veil and Brother Jacob*, ed. Helen Small (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 10. On the imagery of mist in Mansfield and Woolf see Angela Smith, *Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf: a public of two* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), pp. 186-7.

³⁴ She wrote in a letter 23 May 1921: 'Dont I live in glimpses only?'; *The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield*, 4, p. 236. John Middleton Murry writes of her art as offering 'those glimpses of reality that in themselves possess a peculiar vividness'; *Discoveries: Essays in Literary Criticism* (London: W. Collins & Sons Ltd., 1924), p. 142. Mansfield invokes the glimpse in 'Je ne parle pas francais': 'I would not have missed for anything those occasional flashing glimpses I had as we broke through the white circles of lamplight' (II p. 126); and as a privileged moment of nature in her journal: 'these "glimpses" before which all that one ever has written... all... that one ever has read pales... The waves, as I drove home this afternoon and the high foam, how it was suspended in the air before it fell... What is it that happens in that moment of suspension? It is timeless. In that moment (what do I mean?) the whole life of the soul is

contained (*The Katherine Mansfield Notebooks*, ed. by Margaret Scott, 2 vols (Canterbury: Lincoln University Press, 1997), II, 209).

³⁵ *The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield*, 1, p. 331.

³⁶ The artist's vision as a moment of 'lifting the veil' is associated with the philosophy of Bergson and the manifesto of *Rhythm*; see John Middleton Murry, 'Art and Philosophy', *Rhythm* I.1 (Summer 1911), 9-12 (9). Mansfield wrote to Lady Ottoline Morrell in 24 July 1921, 'How strange talking is – what mists rise and fall—how one loses the other & thinks to have found the other—then down comes another soft final curtain'. *The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield*, 4, p. 252.

³⁷ *The Katherine Mansfield Notebooks*, II, p. 59.

³⁸ Derrida writes: 'as what makes the present waver: like the vibrations of a heat wave through which the massiveness of the object world [...] now shimmers like a mirage.' 'Marx's Purloined Letter,' in Michael Sprinker (ed.), *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's Specters of Marx* (London: Verso, 1999), pp. 26-27, 38. Cited by Julian Wolfreys, in *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic, the Uncanny and Literature* (London: Palgrave, 2002), p. 77.

³⁹ Wolfreys, *Victorian Hauntings*, p. 77.

⁴⁰ See Paul March-Russell, in *The Short Story: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 97.